

40 WEEKS EARL BLUMENAUER #34 The National Guard 40 IDEAS

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Background

America faces a national defense crisis. It's not that we are at risk of anyone surpassing our military might; America remains by far the most powerful nation on the planet. The problem is that the way we invest in our military is not sustainable. The U.S. accounts for almost half of worldwide military spending, more than the next 17 countries combined, the majority of which are our allies. The rate of defense spending is increasing faster than the rate of inflation or the growth of the economy. We cannot provide for the training, equipment, salaries, and benefits for the size of military we have now, let alone increase it, as has been suggested by some on the campaign trail. The arithmetic doesn't work.

We must find a way to maintain military strength, but spend far less.

This can be achieved in part by changing patterns of deployment, imposing more aggressive cost control on expensive new weapons systems, and creating fewer deployments in far-flung places, but we must do more. One solution is to place greater emphasis and increase support for the role of the National Guard, Air Guard, and Ready Reserve to strengthen national readiness and provide help in non-military emergencies here at home.

The Army National Guard is the oldest component of the United States armed forces. It serves both state and federal governments so that, while Guard units are combat-trained and can be deployed overseas, they are just as likely to serve in their home communities. The Air National Guard (Air Guard), a component of the National Guard, has units in each of the 50 states and U.S. territories. The Air Guard is made up of part-time professional Airmen that have civilian careers but spend weekends and evenings training and practicing the Air Force specialties. The Ready Reserve Force (RRF) program, initiated in 1976 to support the rapid worldwide deployment of U.S. military forces, primarily supports transport of Army and Marine Corps unit equipment, combat support equipment, and initial resupply during the critical surge period.

Solution

The many Guard and Reserve deployments over the last decade have resulted in highly seasoned guardsmen with more skill and experience than we've ever seen. Our reliance on these brave men and women has also resulted in better equipment than ever before in our Guard armories right here in Oregon, and all across the U.S. Part of the solution to meeting our fiscal needs must come from maintaining and strengthening the substantial – but highly cost-effective – investment that's been made in the Guard and Reserve since 9/11.

They have also been on hand to support communities dealing with natural disasters, from wildfires to devastating floods, all across the U.S. Over 400,000 citizen soldiers who live and work in thousands of communities across the country are ready to confront our challenges at home as well as abroad. The dedication of these citizen soldiers and adaptability of their mission makes the National Guard an ideal complement to the standing military force.

In addition, for a fraction of the cost of maintaining permanent full-time soldiers, we can increase support for the Air Guard and National Guard that already exist in every state, while still maintaining a deployable force large and strong enough to keep America safe.

For example:

- The Guard makes up nearly half of the Army's combat power and more than a third of the Air Force, for about 7 percent of the total defense budget.
- According to the Comptroller of the Defense Department, \$51,000 is budgeted for each reservist and \$223,000 is budgeted for each active duty service member.
- 75 percent of our engineering capabilities, 80 percent of our logistics capability, 75 percent of our medical capability, and 85 of our civil affairs capability comes from the Reserve or Guard.
- Air Guard performs half of all Air Force missions but use only 14% of personnel funds.
- The dual-use (federal and domestic use) of equipment and infrastructure is unique to the National Guard, providing greater access to resources and infrastructure at a fraction of what it costs the Army, Navy, or Air Force.

The Guard also provides opportunities for returning veterans who wish to continue to serve their country in a different capacity as well as young people who can obtain skills much more cost-effectively than through full-time military service.

We will always need to have the basic structure of national defense provided by the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force. We can make our national defense much more effective, however, by increasing the personnel and support of the Guard and Ready Reserve. When it comes to keeping America safe in the midst of shrinking budgets, the National Guard is an investment with a very high return and should play a critical role in meeting the demands of our 21st century commitments.



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